

The Spires

School Lane, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3YA

Inspection dates

18–20 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The effectiveness of leadership and management is good. Leaders, including the proprietary board, have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The acting headteacher has quickly gained the respect and support of the staff team. She is resolute in her determination to ensure that pupils receive the best care and education.
- Leaders have an accurate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, improvement plans are not sufficiently focussed on how actions will have an impact on pupil achievement.
- Subject leaders do not have the opportunity to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. This hampers their ability to drive forward improvements in the subjects they lead.
- Teaching is good. Staff have a secure understanding of pupils' needs and are passionate in their work. They show resilience and a determination to provide pupils with high-quality learning opportunities.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff are well trained and are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are, and feel, safe.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are inspiring. This enables pupils to thrive in an environment where they feel safe, nurtured and well looked after.
- Outcomes for pupils are typically good. Pupils arrive in the school with significant gaps in their learning. Good teaching is beginning to help pupils close the gaps. However, as yet, pupils do not achieve as well as they could, especially with their writing.
- The curriculum, while covering a range of subjects and being effectively intertwined with therapeutic provision, is underdeveloped. It does not meet the needs of pupils well enough.
- Pupils' behaviour is typically good. Staff understand pupils' needs extremely well and manage their complex and emotional needs skilfully.
- The school works effectively with clinicians and therapists to ensure that pupils receive high-quality therapy, following the significant traumas they have experienced.
- Most parents and carers speak positively about the school. They appreciate the level of care and guidance their children receive.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School standards) Regulations 2014 (the independent school standards) and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - school improvement plans indicate how actions taken will improve achievement for pupils and allow them to make the best possible progress
 - subject leaders have increased opportunities to monitor and develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so they know what is, or is not, working well, and why
 - the school’s curriculum and its implementation carefully meet the needs of pupils and prepares them well for their futures.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers check what pupils know and can do more precisely and use this information to inform planning so that activities match the needs of pupils
 - pupils develop their writing skills in English lessons and across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, including the proprietary board, have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- 'Amazing' and 'an inspiration' were just two of the many positive comments used by teachers to describe the leadership of the acting headteacher. Her resolve to ensure that pupils who attend The Spires are provided with the best care and education is unwavering.
- There have been several changes in the leadership of the school since its opening. Nonetheless, the acting headteacher's leadership has resulted in significant improvements in the quality of care and education for pupils being made in a short time. Together with the strong leadership of the head of education and Five Rivers, there is strong capacity of leaders for further improvement.
- Staff share aspirations and determination to improve the life chances of each pupil. Staff talk freely about how there is now a 'culture of learning' in the school. Staff know and share the vision of the acting headteacher. They know what they are working towards. As one member of staff said, 'We have a chance to give ideas to change the school to what it is today.'
- Staff work closely alongside clinicians. This work ensures that pupils receive high-quality therapy, following the significant traumas they have experienced.
- Leaders, including the proprietary board, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Planned actions carefully reflect the school's evaluation of its performance. However, leaders acknowledge that improvement plans are not focused well enough on how actions will have an impact on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through observing learning in lessons, looking at pupils' work and tracking progress. They provide support and guidance where required. Staff told the inspector that, while the acting headteacher is extremely supportive of their work, she does not hesitate to challenge them when it does not meet her high expectations.
- Subject leaders are not provided with opportunities to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the subjects they lead. This hampers their ability to support colleagues and improve pupils' achievement further.
- The curriculum covers a range of subjects. Teachers carefully plan learning activities which encourage and motivate pupils and meet their individual needs. Academic subjects are taught alongside a range of therapeutic provision. However, the curriculum is underdeveloped. It does not enable pupils to make the rapid improvements needed to close the significant gaps in their learning caused by lengthy periods away from education.
- Personal, social and health education, is pivotal to pupils' development at this school. Through this work, pupils begin to learn how to trust adults and form positive relationships with them and each other. For example, the early morning activity, 'funky chickens' provides an opportunity for staff and pupils to socialise together and have fun. This provides a calm and enjoyable start to the school day.

- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is integral to the work of the school. Staff show pupils, through their own behaviour and actions, what it is to work well together and get along. Through this modelling, pupils develop their social skills and the attributes they need to be tolerant and understanding of other people's differences. In addition, pupils learn about people less fortunate than themselves. For example, they were actively involved in the Christmas shoebox appeal for Bulgaria and raising funds to support a hospice in Botley. The development of these skills is preparing pupils well for their future.
- Staff receive high-quality professional development and coaching to improve and develop their teaching practice. As a result, the quality of teaching over time is good.
- Teachers do not always challenge pupils in their learning to achieve the best outcomes. This lack of challenge is most evident in pupils' writing in English and across the wider curriculum.

Governance

- The proprietary board works closely with the acting headteacher to ensure that the needs of pupils are met effectively. It demonstrates a good range of skills and expertise, providing strong support and challenge to the school.
- The proprietary board does not rely merely on information provided by the acting headteacher. For example, the chief executive officer of the board visits the school to gain first-hand evidence about the quality of provision pupils receive. In addition, the board uses the expertise of an independent consultant who provides them with an external view of the effectiveness of the school.
- The proprietary board understands the importance of safer recruitment. All checks are undertaken to ensure that appointed staff are appropriate to work with these highly vulnerable pupils. For example, the single central record is checked to ensure that it is accurate and meets statutory requirements.

Safeguarding

- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The nature of the school means that all pupils are highly vulnerable. Leaders make sure that all statutory requirements for protecting pupils are met fully.
- The culture of safeguarding in the school is demonstrable. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect each pupil from all possible risks. Staff receive effective training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe. Controversial issues are not avoided. For example, staff have undertaken training on child sexual exploitation and the 'Prevent' duty. Consequently, staff are able to spot concerns quickly and take the necessary action with confidence.
- Leaders and the proprietary board fully understand the importance of recruiting staff safely. The checks undertaken are stringent. This ensures that all staff are vetted carefully prior to commencing employment. This confirms that they are suitable to work with children.
- All visitors are checked carefully on arrival and made aware of the school's safeguarding expectations when they sign in. For example, they are informed of who the designated

safeguarding lead is and the school's policy on the use of mobile phones while on the premises.

- Pupils who spoke with the inspector reported that they feel safe in school. This is because they are well supported by staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Good teaching is underpinned by teachers' deep knowledge of the complex needs of each pupil. Teachers typically use their understanding to plan learning that effectively meets the needs of most pupils.
- Staff build highly effective and trusting relationships with pupils and this enables pupils to access learning. Staff provide a safe and nurturing environment, which begins to restore pupils' belief and confidence in their ability to be successful learners.
- Staff provide pupils with activities which motivate them to learn well. For example, pupils were engrossed in a 'scavenger hunt' activity. This activity covered a range of mathematical challenges where pupils needed to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics, including measures and number, to be successful in completing the questions.
- Staff have secure subject knowledge. They are able to use this knowledge effectively to support pupils in their learning. For example, staff rephrase questions to aid pupils' understanding of what they are being asked to do.
- Staff typically plan activities to meet pupils' needs. However, they do not routinely provide pupils with the challenge they require to make the best possible progress and achieve well. This lack of challenge is most prevalent in pupils' writing, both in their English work and across the wider curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure.
- Staff receive high-quality training to recognise signs of harm and abuse. They are assiduous and act quickly to deal with any concerns. Daily briefings ensure effective communication between leaders and staff, which minimises risk to pupils.
- Pupils are learning to enjoy school and this is reflected in their improving attendance. Records confirm that pupils attend well and any absence is followed up quickly.
- The school builds positive links within the local community. Pupils are seen out and about regularly. For example, they took an active role in the Christmas tree festival at the local church and were proud of the trees they had made, including one made out of tennis balls. These opportunities help pupils to be more prepared for life beyond school and to enhance their levels of independence.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils who attend the school have significant complex and mental health needs which can result in displays of challenging behaviour. Staff know pupils well and build extremely positive relationships with them. The detailed knowledge that staff have of each pupil, coupled with their dedication and determination to provide the best care, allows them to manage pupils' behaviour extremely well.
- Pupils who spoke with the inspector were clear that staff are kind and caring and ensure that they enjoy activities in school. For example, staff and pupils participate in Zumba each week. This class was observed by the inspector and it was a delight to see staff and pupils laughing together and having fun.
- Pupils learn to trust the adults who work with them. As a result, pupils are able to build self-confidence and raise their self-esteem. Pupils are confident that they are able to share their worries or concerns with an adult in the school.
- The medical clinicians and therapists work closely with teaching staff. This close partnership reduces pupils' anxieties and enables them to access their learning more effectively. This contributes to the good progress that pupils make.
- Pupils are supervised well at all times during the school day as they move around the school and in lessons. For example, during breaks, pupils are monitored carefully when using outside equipment available to them, such as the trim trail.
- Staff only use the physical restraint of pupils as a last resort. While documentary evidence shows the number of incidents is decreasing, the school is keen to reduce occurrences further.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils who attend this school have experienced significant trauma in their lives. Most of the pupils have been out of education for long periods of time. As a result, on arrival to The Spires, pupils' attainment is often significantly below that expected for their age. This is across all subjects, but particularly in their writing and mathematics.
- Careful viewing of pupils' work during the inspection confirmed that, since arriving at the school, pupils have made strong progress. Good teaching, combined with effective therapeutic provision, is enabling pupils to overcome the many challenges they face. Increasingly, they demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and want to do well. This positive change in pupils' attitudes is due to the care, resilience and determination of staff. As one member of staff stated, 'We will not give up on our children.'
- Pupils are typically provided with activities that meet their academic and emotional needs well. For example, music provides both therapeutic benefits and the opportunity for pupils to excel in a chosen subject, especially in drumming. Such provision reduces pupils' anxious behaviours and increases their self-esteem. For example, the look of joy and excitement of a pupil during a drumming session was a delight and a privilege to observe during the inspection.
- There is a clear focus on developing pupils' skills in the core areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Typically, pupils make good progress in these subjects. However, when the sequencing of learning is not secure and there is a lack of challenge, pupils' progress

falters, most markedly in their writing. The acting headteacher recognises these weaknesses and is taking decisive action to resolve them quickly.

- The acting headteacher has acted quickly to promote reading across the school and there is an expectation that pupils will read in school regularly. Pupils have access to a range of authors and genres from which to select. As a result, pupils' reading is improving. For example, pupils read from a recipe accurately and with confidence, using their knowledge of phonics effectively to read unknown words.
- Pupils have the opportunity to take a range of AQA awards. For example, pupils have been successful in gaining passes in subjects including food technology, music, art, science and personal development. Achieving these awards is increasing pupils' self-esteem and motivation to learn. As a result, pupils are better prepared for their future education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	146166
DfE registration number	865/6051
Inspection number	10086586

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Number of part-time pupils	3
Proprietor	Five Rivers Child Care Ltd
Chair	David Howard
Headteacher	Louise Bethel
Annual fees (day pupils)	£79,950
Telephone number	01722 820970
Website	www.five-rivers.org/education/schools/the-spires
Email address	education@five-rivers.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Spires is operated by Five Rivers Child Care Ltd. The school operates on one site in Salisbury.
- The Spires is an independent special school. The school provides specialist education for up to 22 pupils aged eight to 18 years who have severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- Pupils are placed by their respective local authority. Many, but not all, of the pupils have an education, health and care plan.

- There are currently pupils in key stage 2 and key stage 3.
- The school receives no additional funding from the government.
- The school uses one alternative provider, Wiltshire Outdoor Learning. In addition, pupils are encouraged to visit and take part in activities off the school site. When this happens, pupils are escorted at all times by members of the school staff.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in classes. These were conducted jointly with the acting headteacher.
- The quality of pupils' written work and pictorial records of their learning were viewed by the inspector.
- Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, head of education, staff, the director of finances for Five Rivers, a medical clinician from Five Rivers and the proprietor.
- A discussion was held with a care manager from one of the residential homes.
- The inspector held a telephone conversation with the director from Wiltshire Outdoor Learning who provides alternative provision for the school.
- The views of pupils were gathered informally during the inspection and the inspector considered one response to the pupil survey.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school improvement plan, and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- The inspector took account of the views in the 10 completed staff questionnaires. The one response to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and one text message were taken into account. Emails received by the school from parents were also considered.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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